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ear to accomplish great things ; but otherwise there is danger that his projected work will merely add one more to the accumulation (too great already !) of futile guesses at truth.

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*The Earliest Life of Milton.* Edited by Edward S. Parsons.  
Reprinted in *Colorado College Studies* from *The English Historical Review*, January, 1902.

In the preface to his monumental *Life of Milton* Professor Masson mentions, with a word or two of characterization, all the important biographies of the poet which were known to him down to the year 1851. Of some seventeen the three earliest were : (1) the one by Aubrey, written not later than 1680 ;<sup>1</sup> (2) the life by Anthony Wood, written after Aubrey's, and before 1691 ;<sup>2</sup> (3) the life by Edward Phillips, Milton's nephew, probably third in order of time, and published in 1694.<sup>3</sup> Of these three the last is the most valuable, though indeed quite barren considering the biographer's personal intimacy with his subject. Earlier than the two last mentioned, and perhaps earliest of all, is one contained in an anonymous manuscript found by Dr. Andrew Clark among the papers of Anthony Wood in the Bodleian, and printed by Professor Parsons for the first time. It consists of about forty-six hundred words and is based chiefly on the writings of Milton, especially the famous autobiographical passages of the *Second Defense*, and for the rest upon hearsay, or perhaps, in very slight degree, upon personal observation. It constitutes the chief source of Wood's account, who appropriates much of it with slight alteration, even going so far as to employ its peculiar wording in preference to that of Milton's prose where the two run nearly parallel.<sup>4</sup> It is clearly one of many

<sup>1</sup> In *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, edited by Dr. Andrew Clark, 2, 60-72.

<sup>2</sup> *Fasti*, 1, 480-486, Bliss's edition of the *Athenae* and *Fasti*.

<sup>3</sup> Godwin, *Lives of Edward and John Phillips*, 350-383.

<sup>4</sup> Wood's alterations are generally of such a nature as to show his disapproval of Milton's opinions and acts. Thus the sentence, 'In which [du Moulin's *Clamor Regii Sanguinis*] Salmasius was hugely extoll'd, and Mr. Milton as falsly defam'd,' becomes in Wood, 'Salmasius was highly extoll'd in it, and Milton had his just character given therein.'

instances where Wood employed the services of others to gather material for his great work of the *Athenae* and *Fasti*; and thus it follows that whatever important information it might have given we have already received through Wood's account.

One curious anecdote, however, of the blind Milton, fallen on evil days, appears for the first time. The author has remarked his unfailing devotion to the Muses. 'And hee waking early (as is the use of temperate men) had commonly a good Stock of Verses ready against his Amanuensis came, which, if it happened to be later than ordinary, hee would complain, saying *hee wanted to bee milkd.*' He is also said to have procured relief of some sort for 'the Grand child of the famous Spencer, a Papist suffering in his concerns in Ireland.' Two interesting traditions mentioned by Richardson<sup>1</sup> are confirmed—one to the effect that, as Milton interceded for the life of Sir William Davenant under the Commonwealth, so Davenant interceded for Milton at the Restoration; and another that Milton was asked by Charles II to become his Latin Secretary, an office which he had accepted under Cromwell. As Richardson evidently got these facts from sources altogether independent of the newly recovered life, the editor's statement that 'the manuscript is closely related to Richardson's life of Milton' is not wholly exact.

Another sentence is open to misunderstanding: 'The manuscript has the double distinction of being, first, the earliest biography of Milton ever written, and, secondly, the one seventeenth-century biography of the poet in which he is treated with entire sympathy.' In the first place it cannot be proved to be the earliest life unless it can be shown to be earlier than Aubrey's. The editor tries to establish his claim by saying that Aubrey's life, 'even if written earlier cannot be strictly called a biography; it is merely a collection of biographical jottings.' It is indeed fragmentary and ill-arranged, but is, I think, more thoroughly informed by the true spirit of biography, as exemplified in a master like Boswell, than any other of the early lives. One can only regret that Aubrey's passion for matters biographical was not intensified and steadied by devotion to some great personality such as Milton. The second part of the sentence last quoted—at least the words, 'entire sympathy'

<sup>1</sup> *Explanatory Notes and Remarks on Paradise Lost*, lxxxix, c.

—should perhaps be qualified. The author's sympathy is rather with Milton the individual than with his concern in politics. For the latter he is slightly apologetic at times. His own opinions are neither obtrusive nor clearly defined, except that he disapproved of Presbyterians, and probably of the tendencies of his times towards absolutism. His chief aim is the illustration of Milton's courage, cheerful self-sacrifice, and his sublime isolation.

The editor's work on the whole deserves much praise. It is so closely condensed that it hardly reveals at first the amount of labor which it cost, and leaves the reader to wish at times that he might have been allowed to follow Professor Parsons in some of the details of his search for the author, or of his comparison of this account with others. His notes of all erasures and alterations in the manuscript, together with a facsimile of one of its pages, virtually put the original within reach of everyone.

The question of authorship, always fascinating, presents no little difficulty in the present case. Identification of handwriting naturally suggests itself as the first means of solution. Professor Parsons, however, gives eighteen names of men who did not write this life, assuming 'that penman and author are one.' Among these are Aubrey, Joyner,<sup>1</sup> Edward Phillips, Marvell, Ellwood, Andrew Allam, and Dr. Paget. On the other hand, we are told that 'there are great difficulties in the theory that the manuscript was written by an amanuensis.' Just what these are the editor does not say. They appear to be twofold: (1) It is probably not a mere copy from another manuscript, as is shown by erasures and alterations of a sort which are to be expected rather in an autograph than in a copy. For example, on the back of the last page is the first draft of a passage found in the text. It is much interlined and altered, and finally crossed out altogether. It appears in the text after further alterations. (2) It is not written at dictation, as is shown by certain erasures and substitutions to avoid the recurrence of a word or sound—an imperfection which would, in all probability have been avoided in the process of oral delivery.<sup>2</sup> Apart

<sup>1</sup> Mentioned by Loveday (not Lovedale) as the friend of Wood; see *Fasti*, ed. Bliss, 1, 480, n. 5.

<sup>2</sup> P. 8, l. 13, 'way' is substituted for 'journey,' as 'journey' is found to occur two lines above in the same sentence. Whether it is written above or after the erased word the editor does not say. It might, in a conceivable case,

from such considerations, and upon general grounds, Professor Parsons inclines to believe that the author was some intimate friend of Milton, nearly coëval, on the whole sympathizing with him in politics, and possessing some technical knowledge of medicine. He suggests Dr. Nathan Paget as the one corresponding most nearly to this description.

The question remains open, however. It is found by the editor that of Wood's account forty-five per cent. is based upon the manuscript before us, less than ten per cent. upon Aubrey's life, and the rest is composed as follows : of 'matter from the autobiographical passages in Milton's prose works ; a careful list of his writings, and Wood's own interpretation of Milton's acts and of national events.' He begins his account with these words : 'This year [1635] was incorporated master of arts John Milton, not as it appears so in the register, . . . but from his own mouth to my friend, who was well acquainted with, and had from him, and from his relations after his death, most of this account of his life and writings following.' That this 'friend' was not Aubrey is evident, as Professor Parsons says, since 'most of this account was *not* drawn from Aubrey's life, nor can we suppose that we have here a second life by Aubrey, since the manuscript is not in Aubrey's peculiar style. It is true that Wood mentions on p. 486, '*The Body of Divinity*, which my friend calls *Idea Theologiae*,' a name given to it by Aubrey in his life. But, as Professor Parsons suggests, Wood may here have confused for the moment his main authorities, namely Aubrey and some other 'friend,' author of the anonymous life before us.

Such a friend may have been Andrew Allam, Vice-Principal of St. Edmund's Hall, Oxford, whose claims to the authorship of this life Professor Parsons has not seen fit to review, though they seem worth considering. Allam was born in 1655 and died in 1685.

be important to know whether such corrections were made in the moment of writing or upon reperusal. Other examples are : 8, 13, 'this' replacing 'which,' since 'which' recurs within less than a line ; 8, 21, 'liv'd' for 'passed' with 'passing' in a different sense a line and a half above ; 11, 14, 'went back' for 'returned' with 'return' two lines below ; 12, 11, 'of so great concern' for 'so necessary,' with 'necessity' two lines above ; 15, 16 and 17, is an uncorrected instance, where 'expectation' and 'expect' occur almost within one line.

He was a precocious young man, and advanced rapidly to the vice-principalship. His life was uneventful, being spent almost entirely in and about Oxford, with perhaps an occasional trip to London. It appears further from passages here subjoined in footnotes<sup>1</sup> that he was one of Wood's most intimate friends, and his most important aid at Oxford in collecting materials for the lives of modern authors in the *Athenae* and *Fasti*. He was well acquainted with literary men of his time, and more deeply interested in men than in measures. His toleration appears from the fact that Wood, who was under suspicion of being a Roman Catholic, was unaided by

<sup>1</sup>In 1685 Wood writes, 'June 17, Wednesday, between 12 and 1 died my friend Andrew Allam' (*Wood's Life and Times*, edited by Dr. Andrew Clark, 3, 144). From Wood's *Life of Allam*, (*Athenae*, 4, 174-176): 'He was a person of eminent virtues, was sober, temperate, moderate and modest even to example. He understood the controversial writings between conformists and nonconformists, protestants and papists, far beyond his years, which was advanced by a great and happy memory. And I am persuaded had he not been taken off by the said offices, he would have gone beyond all of his time and age in those matters, and might have proved an useful and signal member to the church of England, for which he had a most zealous respect. He understood the world of men well, authors better, and nothing but years and experience were wanting, to make him a compleat walking library. . . . He also many times lent his assisting hand to the author of this present work, especially as to the Notitia of certain modern writers of our nation, while the said author was day and night drudging after those more ancient. For the truth is (which hath been a wonder to him since his death) he understood well what he wanted, and what would be fit for him to be brought into this work, which none else in the university could (as he and the author knew full well to their great reluctancy) or would give any assistance or encouragement.' Hearne, writing in 1710 (*Hearne's Collections*, edited by C. E. Doble for the Oxford Historical Society, 3, 35), speaks of Aubrey as having helped Wood, and goes on to say: 'Anthony had also a vast number of his Materials & Accounts from Mr. Andrew Allam of Edm. Hall, who indeed was not only an ingenious but very good Man, as well as a good, sound Scholar. He knew much of Books, especially modern ones, and was so well seen in the characters of Parsons, that he could describe most men of any note in the Kingdom, & there was hardly a face in Oxford but was so well known to him, that he could give exact descriptions thereof.' The relationship of the two men is further illustrated in that part of Wood's *Diary* or *Almanac* between the years 1680 and 1685, when Allam died at the early age of thirty. See Wood's *Life and Times*, 2, 509 ff. Frequent notes in Allam's hand are inserted dealing with a great variety of doings and people at Oxford.

any of the Oxford men except Allam.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore he was the author of a life of Milton mentioned by Aubrey in the following note : 'Quaere Mr. (Andrew) Allam, of Edmund-hall, Oxon, of John Milton's life writt by himselfe.'<sup>2</sup> In view of this evidence one is tempted to infer that the anonymous life was compiled by Allam for Wood's use in the *Fasti*.

But certain doubts arise on closer examination. Allam was but nineteen when Milton died, and, living at Oxford, could hardly have enjoyed such intimacy with him as Wood implies. But that his friend relies also, as Wood says, upon information from the poet's relatives would seem to indicate that this intimacy did not extend over the greater part of the poet's life ; and such parts of the biography as appear to be based upon personal observation or acquaintance pertain to the poet's latest years. A reference to Foresthall, instead of Foresthill, the home of Mary Powell, near Oxford, is a mistake which one would not expect from an Oxford man. Furthermore the author, speaks of *Tetrachordon* as based upon the teaching of 'our Savior, in those four places of the Evangelists,' whereas only one of these places is in the Gospels, and the title of the tract says itself 'the four chief places in the Scripture.' The apology for biographical literature at the opening shows that this life was written, not to be used in the compilation of another, but for publication or circulation. This is borne out by a sentence on p. 21 : 'But that this age is insensible of the great obligation it has to him, is too apparent in that hee has no better a Pen to celebrate his Memory.' It has already been remarked that the biographer is not outspoken in the matter of politics, but that he

<sup>1</sup> From Hearne's *Account of Wood*, *Athenae* 1, cxxix, cxxx : 'He [Wood] was by the vulgar at least taken to be a Rom. Cath. and the author of these matters, who hath a great respect for his memory, in his inquiries concerning him, could never hear any other report. Indeed he shews himself that way inclined in his *Athenae*, and I have been told he received pensions from some of them. . . . But this however I am apt to think proceeded not from any averseness to the church of England, but only from the encouragement he received from this party, more than he did from any Church of England man, in carrying on his great and tiresome work of *Athenae*, for if you will believe what he himself says, and what I have often heard reported in Oxon, the greatest help he found from any one person in that university, was from Mr. Andrew Allam, vice-principal of St. Edmund's hall, who died, to our author's great reluctancy, an. 1685.'

<sup>2</sup> *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, 2, 72.

disapproves of dissenters on the one hand, and, on the other, of the doctrine of non-resistance. In one of Allam's notes inserted in Wood's diary<sup>1</sup> he calls the second short parliament, which has just been prorogued, 'fiery, eager, and high-flying,' and refers with mild enthusiasm to the prospect of the king's holding the next parliament at Oxford. Wood asserts his 'zealous respect' for the church.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as already said, the manuscript is not in Allam's hand,<sup>3</sup> nor does it appear to be copied, or written at dictation. Among the books left to Wood by Allam is a copy of Bates' *Elenchus Motuum* containing a Latin note by Allam of some length about the author.<sup>4</sup> 'This note,' says Dr. Clark, 'is of importance as showing the nature of those notes by Allam which Wood admits helped him in the *Athenae*.' Is it possible that in the manuscript we have the translation of a Latin life by Allam, made by one who was less skilful, and who is responsible for such errors as have been cited? The style, though at times idiomatic, is, on the whole, stiff and involved, with a preponderance of long sentences and elaborate subordinate elements, frequently participial. In detail, the words sometimes carry meanings which are nearer to the Latin than those which they possess at present, yet these meanings were in each case not uncommon in the seventeenth century.

Comparison with Allam's works, if worth while, might yield something more definite. But, except as a matter of curiosity, the question is perhaps not important enough to deserve the bestowal of much time and pains.

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<sup>1</sup> *Wood's Life and Times*, 2. 511, under January 10, 1681.

<sup>2</sup> The published works of Allam are meagre. They all appeared in 1684, and consist principally of biographical prefaces to works by Dr. Richard Cosin, Dr. George Griffith, and John Corbet. Cosin was a sixteenth-century authority on ecclesiastical law; Griffith an episcopal presbyterian, as he says, who waged war against independents and other sectaries; and Corbet an anti-presbyterian, sometime minister at Bonhill, near Glasgow. I have been unable to find in this country copies of the editions containing Allam's prefaces. At his death he was collecting materials for a work to be called *Notitia Ecclesiae* or a *History of Cathedrals*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the facsimile of one of Allam's autograph notes in Clark's *Wood's Life and Times*, 4, Plate I.

<sup>4</sup> *Wood's Life and Times*, 3, 167.